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ABSTRACT

Research dealing with attitudes toward women comparing black and white, male and female university students has had mixed results, but research on this topic has used a variety of measures. This study used black (N=162) and white (N=155) college students who completed Spence and Helmreich's 15-item Attitudes toward Women Scale which considers women's roles in the family and in society in general. A significant main effect for sex indicated that women were more liberal; there was neither a main effect of race nor a sex x race interaction. Results are consistent with previous research suggesting that as blacks are more fully integrated with the white community, blacks will assume some of the same sex role attitudes of whites, and race may not be a factor in large urban areas. The findings may be related to actual social change or to the sample studied. (Author/ABL)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN AMONG BLACK AND WHITE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Paper presented at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Psychological Association at Tulsa, OK, April 21-23, 1988

ABSTRACT

Research dealing with attitudes toward women comparing Black and White, male and female university students has had mixed results; but research on this topic has used a variety of measures. We compared 162 Black (36% male) and 155 White (47% male) students using Spence & Helmreich's 15-item Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS) which considers women's roles in the family and in society in general. A significant main effect for sex ($p<.0001$) indicated that women were more liberal; there was neither a main effect of race nor sex x race interaction. The findings may be related to actual social change or the sample studied.

BACKGROUND

Societal attitudes have changed considerably in recent years--notably attitudes towards women's roles. Research dealing with attitudes toward women comparing Black and White, male and female university students has had mixed results; but research on this topic has used a variety of measures. Spence and Helmreich's (1978) Attitude toward Women Scale (AWS) is one of the most commonly used instruments for assessing attitudes towards women's rights and roles in the family and society. Higher scores on the AWS are considered to reflect more liberal (i.e. profeminist) attitudes. Although widely used elsewhere, the AWS has been little used in comparisons of Black and White university students.

Gackenbach (1978) found a significant sex by race interaction indicating that White females were more liberal than males and Black females. More recently, Clark (1986) found significant main effects for sex (females more liberal) and race (Whites more liberal), but no interaction. Her study was conducted at universities in the Southeast and she suggested that her findings might not generalize to large urban areas. In the study reported here, Black and White students at two universities in New Orleans were compared using the AWS. It was hypothesized that females would be more liberal than males.

METHOD

Subjects. Three hundred seventeen Black and White student volunteers from Psychology courses at two large urban universities participated. There were 162 Black students (36% male) and 155 White students (47% male). The data presented here are from single, non-parent students who represented the racial majority at their respective universities.

Procedure. Subjects completed a background form as well as the 15-item Attitudes toward Women Scale.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, a significant main effect for sex ($F_{1,313}=62.18$, $p<.0001$) indicated that women were more liberal; however, there was neither a significant main effect of race nor sex x race interaction. The means and standard deviations of AWS scores are shown in Table 2.

DISCUSSION

Females had more liberal attitudes than males, supporting the findings of Gackenbach (1978) and Clark (1986). Blacks did not, however, differ from Whites. This is consistent with a suggestion by Gackenbach (1978) that as Blacks are more fully integrated with the White community, Blacks will also assume some of the sex role attitudes of Whites. Also, Clark's (1986) suggestion that race may not be a factor in large urban areas (such as New Orleans) is supported by the findings reported here.

TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance

SOURCE	df	MS	F	p
Sex	1	2162.15	62.18	0.0001
Race	1	90.08	2.58	0.1085
Sex x Race	1	26.05	0.75	0.3874
Within	313	34.77		

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations

	Male			Female		
	n	mean	s.d.	n	mean	s.d.
Black	58	28.95	7.18	104	33.70	5.04
White	73	29.45	7.31	82	35.38	4.28

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